DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 257 256 EC 172 583

AUTHOR Ungerleider, Dorothy
TITLE Controlled Rage: An Overlooked Cause of Remediation Failure.
PUB DATE 21 Feb 85
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the International Conference of the Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities (San Francisco. CA, February 20-23, 1985).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Failure; Adjustment (to Environment); Delinquency; *Emotional Problems; *Reading Difficulties; *Remedial Instruction; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Anger

ABSTRACT

Experiences of an individual working with illiterate delinquents are related. It is suggested that controlled rage as a concomitant to learning failure is a potential source of school difficulty as well as social violence. A case of a ninth-grader with reading problems whose IQ had steadily decreased with age is cited. The schools' unsuccessful efforts with the student, his family's frustrations, and his own deep humiliation at being unable to read are examined. Suggestions are made for teachers to combat remediation failure, including listening differently, seeking the student's collaboration, and sharing personal experiences and feelings with students. (CL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Dorothy Ungerleider
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

ED257256

CONTROLLED RAGE: AN OVERLOOKED CAUSE OF REMEDIATION FAILURE

Conference paper presented at International Conference of Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities (ACLD), Feb. 21, 1985, in San Francisco, CA.

by Dorothy Ungerleider

For many of us who call ourselves teachers, helpers, therapists, specialists, we have often entered the helping professions out of a wish to alleviate pain and build esteem in troubled and failing humans. We apply our best intentions and best interventions, and still we continue to LOSE so many. In the past decade, the WHY of those losses has become my obsession. I'm here today to share with you what I discovered by trying to find out Why we lost one particular youth on his path to learning.

I've asked so many WHY's over the years, particularly in the beginning when I worked with severely disturbed youth in neuro-psychiatric institutes and residential treatment centers. I first encountered the delinquent population while consulting for the California Youth Authority and the juvenile justice system. These were the young street warriors, recently separated from their respective gangs by the courts. They varied in their backgrounds and their crimes, but a surprisingly high percentage of them shared a common attitude -- school and teachers were perceived as enemies.

They wore different masks, but whether they were smiling or sullen, they all kept their distance from us "grown ups". A few would share their feelings about school, and during those guarded interviews, I noted an interesting phenomenon. There was surprisingly frequent agreement between their grade scores on achievement tests and their own self-report about the grade at which they "turned off"

to school. I could almost sort out the truly unable learners -- the LD's from the strongly unwilling ones by noting if they had indeed mastered the skills through the grade level they described as the turn-off point.

Gradually, I learned of one very common secret harbored by many of them: they were deeply humiliated by illiteracy and they longed for help but were too embarrassed to ask for it in a classroom setting. The degree of humiliation was most dramatically brought home to me when one of these young men confided his involvement in an undiscovered murder. The confession shocked me almost as much as the one that followed: His friends all knew of his murder, but no one knew that he couldn't read. Subsequently, I met a prison psychologist who told of similar stories about the deep disgrace and secrecy surrounding many inmates' illiteracy.

The frequency of untreated illiteracy among the delinquent population came as no surprise. So many were from disadvantaged or severely disturbed home situations where no one had the time, funds, or sophistication to seek proper help. The list of sociological Why's behind their school failure filled countless textbooks.

But it was not so easy to explain the Why of Tony Petri, a young man I met when called for consultation by his reading specialist at the suburban Junior High. She had been baffled by this 6 foot 3 in. 230 lb. ninth grader whose IQ scores had ranged from a 119 at age 8 to an unexplained 74 at age 14, and who could build a motorcycle from the ground up without any instructions, but who could not read a second grade book or write a single legible sentence, in spite of ten years of suburban schooling. Tony was neither a minority nor disadvantaged. He did not misbehave or act out. Well, not much. His cum file had a record of 7 incidents of horseplay,

pushing, hitting or encouraging others to fight, and it mentioned his being with 3 boys in a gang looking for revenge for a wrong-doing against them. But the law had never been involved -- not yet.

I set about my consultant's role with mild intrigue, wondering to myself, "Why did we lose this boy?" The question went beyond mild intrigue, however, when I learned, over time, that throughout Tony's ten years of schooling, he had been seen by 23 different professionals whose services had been sought by the parents. The question grew: "Why do we EVEN lose those children who have been exposed to years of remedial interventions? What goes wrong in the process?

Fate has a strange way of leading us. I began to work with Tony, coincidentally, at the time I was asked to lecture to juvenile court judges about the behavioral characteristics of learning disabled youth. There was growing concern in the 1970's about the relationship between learning disabilities and juvenile delinquency. The justice system, which had always concerned itself with actuarial statistics, such as "how many of which age group did what crime" -- was suddenly noticing some dramatic changes in those numbers. Youth arrests for violent crimes had risen 254% in fifteen years, coinciding in that same period with a dramatic drop in literacy skills on national achievement tests. Over 1 million youth were entering the juvenile justice system each year, over 100,000 of them for felonious and violent crimes. But then, as now--in the 1980's--there were no national figures regarding school records or learning histories of this population. Social scientists were just <u>beginning</u> to ask what percentage of the young people incarcerated for violent crimes were

also functional illiterates, for whatever reason. They had not yet thought of asking the percentages with diagnosed learning disabilities. There was still no agreement on the definition of that condition!!!

Because of growing public pressure, the Justice Department conducted a major inquiry into the "LD/JD" link and published its findings in 1976. (Murray, 1976) The findings were conflicting, inconclusive, and poorly documented. The need for more research was demanded.

One particular statement in that report caught my attention. It said, "The MOST PROVOCATIVE INFORMATION IS NEARLY INTRACTABLE TO SYSTEMATIC EXAMINATION. EACH ACCOUNT IS A STORY IN ITSELF, ABOUT A SINGLE CASE, AND TO BE PERSUASIVE, IT MUST BE TOLD IN SOME DETAIL." (Murray, 1976, p. 30)

Tony Petri would become my single case. (Ungerleider, 1985). Perhaps from Tony, I could discover some insights about the yet unexplained connection between learning disabilities and juvenile delinquency, if, in fact, there was one.

Why Tony? He was not, in fact, an adjudicated delinquent, but there were many reasons that made his case the right one for me. First of all, Tony was fifteen. Prevailing opinion at that time was that learning disabled adolescents were too old for real help. Fifteen was also a ripe age for proneness to delinquency, and Tony was prone. He surrounded himself with delinquent friends, several of whom already had arrest records. A second reason was his mother's penchant for saving every scrap of paper and document about her only child, allowing me great accuracy in reconstructing the sequences of his life. Third was Tony himself, almost an archetype of the learning disabled child with his multiple disabilities and low academic per-

formance coupled with high intelligence. Fourth, Tony had agreed to work with me in ongoing educational therapy, which meant that I could observe his academic performance as well as his reactions to the data from his past.

Something had gone terribly wrong for Tony Petri. In a search which was to consume the next five years of my life, all those somethings were put on trial: schools, counselors, parents, professionals, Tony--his psyche and sense organs. The Bureaucracy. The curriculum. The diagnoses. In other words, the interactional, interpersonal, temperamental, and constitutional aspects of the whole process.

Mrs. Petri's records led me to "people searches" and interviews with professionals who had not seen Tony for years, but who, fortunately, still retained surprisingly vivid memories about him. As the body of data grew, I constructed charts and time line overlays to help reveal the interplay of events which had occurred simultaneously at home, at school, and developmentally inside Tony.

Investigation of the facts revealed that Tony did indeed have many disabilities that interfered with his normal acquisition of skills: perceptual dysfunction, directionality confusion, visual dysfunction, allergies, gross motor problems, attention problems, academic failure. All of them had been identified by variuos tests, expertise, and observation. Fidgetiness and poor concentration were mentioned frequently enough in his history to be suggestive of an attention problem. Investigation also revealed, however, that no one had considered the differential diagnoses possible for a symptom called "fidgetiness" -- which could be a sign of allergies, visual stress, emotional stress, and, of course, hyperactivity.

Tony endured six psychoeducational evaluations, providing this investigator with an abundance of scores, opinions, and diagnoses, many of them conflicting.

I wished to "know" this boy. Many years ago, I had read a quote by a man named J.W. Rothney. He said, "SOME DAY, FOR SOME REASON, YOU MAY WANT TO KNOW A CHILD VERY WELL. YOU NEVER WILL. HUMAN BEINGS ARE MUCH TOO COMPLEX TO BE FULLY UNDERSTOOD AT ANY ONE TIME AND SINCE VARIABILITY...IS LIKELY TO INCREASE AS TIME PASSES AND ENVIRONMENTS CHANGE, IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT ANYONE IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE WILL DESCRIBE A CHILD OR YOUTH WELL ENOUGH SO THAT HE CAN BE FULLY KNOWN." (Rothney, 1968, p. vii)

Well, the challenge of that statement haunted me. I had to try to know this boy very well. I had to know more than was being revealed by test data and testimonial. I had to know about feelings.

What of Tony's feelings at each point in time? How did his unique temperament affect his responses? What could we find if we studied the <u>simultaneous</u> events in Tony's school and home lives? What was the effect of each upon the other?

How did Tony's mother, Ann Petri, <u>feel</u> when the kindergarten teacher told her, over the phone, "There is something wrong with your child." The label of Wrongness--attached to a five year old by a substitute teacher with one year of experience, disturbed the mother to such a degree that it remained in her subconscious thought and affected much of her ensuing behavior.

How did Tony <u>feel</u> about and react to the frequent testing, eye examinations, prescriptions for, and then against, eyeglasses; or about the conflicting judgments by inexperienced professionals, con-

descension by some school personnel, pressure on his parents' time an financies, school grade retentions--at three different times--made more incongruous by his unusually large size and shame toward his body?

How did Tony feel about the persistence by the reading specialists, year after year, with only one remedy--phonics--as the answer to all?

What were the effects of his tormenting allergies which were treated only with medications for the symptoms because of prejudicial attitudes by his doctors against the medical subspecialty of allergy? The medications, by the way, caused the same problem as the allergies; they made him drowsy and unable to concentrate. And fidgety. Interestingly, a recent study in the Annals of Allergy compared academic and social behavior of allergic and non-allergic children (200 of each) and found only one significant difference--behavior such as hyperactivity and drowsiness which were side-effects of some medications. (McLoughlin, 1984)

How did humiliation and accelerating failure affect Tony's behavior? How did he protect himself from such psychological pain?

And what were the consequences that grew out of each experience, both for Tony and for his parents?

The answers, in my opinion, could only be found by that elusive "knowing". How does one really get to "know" another human being? Is it through the judgments and perceptions of others or through the shared confidences of the victims? How does one get inside another's head in order to imagine what it was like during a

long-ago time? How does one build confidence when trust has been violated for so long, when secrecy has replaced the willingness to confide?

This is the challenge of the clinician, and those of you who are clinicians will understand. I come to you today as a clinician. I believe the Petris allowed me to know, and consequently to learn from and about them. My work with Tony became a kind of qualitative research--a type which is increasingly emerging in the 80's. (Stainback, 1984).

In qualitative research, reality is what people imagine it to be and that reality changes with the changes in people's perceptions. In quantitative research, perceptions are altered by facts.

In the Petri case, my conclusions have grown out of their subjective memories from the past--the feelings and attitudes that have remained in their minds over time.

I believe the explicit accuracy of words and events recalled is less important than the Petris <u>perceptions</u> of those words and events and how they affected behavior. In fact, I believe that this kind of research can provide us with the same leaps in understanding the IMPACT OF TEMPERAMENT AND MISUNDERSTOOD HUMAN INTERACTIONS as neurotechnology did in altering understanding of brain function.

You have seen the list of observable factors behind Tony's failure. Now let's consider the hidden factors that evolved through the process of getting to know this family.

First, who was the young Tony Petri? He described himself at various times with these adjectives: Oaf, pudnick, clumsy, animal, stubborn, troublemaker, mean and despicable, liar, cheat, fake. All

secret, all negative thoughts. One day he said, "I tried. I know I tried, but somehow, everything always came out wrong."

His teachers perceived this private child quite differently. Here are some of their collecitve perceptions: "Nice boy...Quiet... Chose to sit in the back... He's just not trying... Doesn't seem to care...He always holds back...He acts so nice, so passive, never expresses anger. But there's never any joy either... So defensive... like a wounded animal. He never really refuses to do anything. You just kind of feel it."

One insightful tester wrote, "Tony shows passive resistance from repressed hostility"--from controlling angry feelings."

Regarding the nice things people said of him, Tony explained and dismissed them this way: "Everybody was so nice to me. But they never saw my other side. The bad side...Yeah, those teachers all used to believe in me. I really had 'em fooled. One of these days they'll find out just how crazy I am!" Then he added, "There's lots about me you don't know. Like my friends--they're all the bad guys around here, the delinquents. They do the things I always wanted to do but never did. Me, I'll break things, not people. I'll break things and pretend they're people.

As Tony learned to trust, I learned that everybody had not been "so nice" to him in those early years. The hidden determinants in Tony's failure began to surface--the secret thoughts of rebellion and retaliation, the communication failure, the breakdown in trust, the temperamental traits, and the growing powerlessness.

Tony had a second grade teacher, Loreen Hinkle. I had learned that Miss Hinkle was dying of a brain tumor. When informed of the news, 15-year old Tony reacted like this: "Miss Hinkle...Yeah...

she probably wouldn't ever remember my name. But I'll never forget hers. How I hated her. Miserable, nasty lady. She was a real freak! Always pulling my ear. One of those old-fashioned types--you know, the kind that, if you don't do what you're supposed to do, she grabs you by the hair or smacks you on the hand with a ruler. Real cute stuff like that. I'd like to go back and handcuff her to the car and...and run over her face!" "You know, I don't usually carry a vengence, and I only wish everybody would have a happy life, and when they die, die quick, with no pain. But I really don't care what happens to Miss Hinkle. I really hope she kicks the bucket. And suffers...suffers the whole time."

Indelible images, indelible feelings. This was a ninth grader talking, talking about a woman he hadn't seen in over eight years!

How did Tony handle such feelings when he was a second grader?

"Y'know," he said, "I never gave her...any trouble, but I wish...I wish I had. I didn't say anything...but I wanted to...I wanted to...All I did was just...suck it in...Yeah. I just sucked it in."

That he did. The facts showed that Tony was in ongoing psychotherapy during the year of his entry into Miss Hinkle's class. Yet the second grader never mentioned one word of this woman or his situation to the therapist. The therapist kept presuming Tony's increasing withdrawal was due to new problems at home. He never visited the school or had any contact with the teacher. Perhaps we must realize that 8-year-olds can't always express the source of their troubled thoughts.

Two years later, Tony entered the fourth grade class of Ella Koontz, a teacher whose name evoked these words:

"Looking back, I should have killed her. I'll never forget this system she had--these colored slips, white and red and blue, and black. Her own special stupid system for if you were a good or a bad student. Black was for the worst--I always got black, of course. I either tore 'em up or, if I brought 'em home, I'd light a match and burn 'em." Then he described his bonfires in the kitchen sink.

That was how he handled the black slips. Here is how he handled Miss Ella Koontz: "I learned pretty quick never to talk back to her, because I realized, even when I was that young, that she wanted me to talk back, that she was just setting me up for some other insult. I wouldn't give her the pleasure, so I just took it from her and didn't say nothin'. But I did have one way of bugging her. I used to wear shoes with taps. Well, those shoes made a real loud clicking noise on those hard floors, and I'd walk over real slow and loud to the pencil sharpener, and she'd always harass me about the noise, but there was nothing she could do about it. I never answered her fresh or anything--just clicked around in those shoes.

"I knew she considered me stupid, and whenever something had to be read out loud, she always called on me first, just to embarrass me. If I'd screw up on a word, she wouldn't let it go or tell it to me. Oh, no, that'd be too quick. She'd make me stand there in front of everybody and tell me to keep trying, pointing out how wrong I was. Over and over. I used to try to hide for the spelling games because I knew I couldn't spell. But she'd wait til all the teams were set, and then she'd find the best team with the smartest kids, and she'd say to the whole class, "We'd better put Tony on this team to balance it out." I didn't talk back, but I think I should have.

I should have hit her as hard as I could, but I always backed away from things. I've just always figured that everything will come back to those who dole it out. Just like Miss Hinkle with that brain tumor. Yeah, it all comes back."

"It was an interesting thing, though, about the other kids in that class. When she'd try to humiliate me, the kids wouldn't laugh. In fact, there was always a kind of an eerie silence, like they knew something was wrong--something was wrong with her." (God bless the children--for their sixth sense).

Certainly, Loreen Hinkle and Ella Koontz were troubled individuals who did not represent the majority of Tony's teachers. But mustn't we begin to question the impact of even one such experience on a young mind? A recent study in the American Journal of Diseases of Children (Krugman, 1985) reported seventeen 3rd and 4th graders from the same classroom all suffered symptoms of emotional and physical distress--headaches, stomach aches, nightmares, and excessive fear about school performance. Months went by before their parents paid attention, and then only because an astute pediatrician used by many of them became suspicious of emotional abuse by the teacher.

Most of Tony's teachers were sensitive, caring, well-meaning--but untrained in ways of meeting the special needs of this boy. When Tony was asked about the teachers who cared, Tony made this sad and ironic comment: "You know, it's funny, but I can never remember the good ones."

That same day, another of his comments verified my growing suspicions:

"If I didn't want to do something, there was nobody could make me...at least, not in school. If I didn't want to hear about it or

learn about it, my mind would just click out. I just wouldn't do their work...but I'd pretend to do it just to keep out of trouble so nobody's yellin' at me. I could even make myself sick...it was a way out for a while." The boy who had tried until everything came out wrong had stopped trying.

Tony wasn't the only one who felt helpless and powerless. His parents, too, were victims of the help-seeking process. Mrs. Petri, who, when we first met, had said, "I pushed and pushed all his younger days. I can't push any more," told poignantly about one of those pushes.

"The hours we spent! It wasn't just him alone, you understand. We'd sit at the kitchen table. 'Spell "wand", I'd say...W..A..N..D. Then he'd say, W-A-N-D. Now put your hand over it...Now close your eyes...NOW spell it...now OPEN your eyes...Now spell it AGAIN. Over and over. Try! You're not trying'...'I am!' he'd say. And the next day, he wouldn't remember even one of the handful of words we'd worked on...I tell you...That Little child. Oh, how I want him to pass just one lousy little spelling test. Just one!"

And again, at that same table in Tony's sixth grade year, he struggled with taped phonic sounds, his fifth year of the same method in a new wrapper. The mother describes it:

"Tony sat at that kitchen table, listening to those recordings. He sat by himself, not wanting anyone to see him or come near him. The tape told him to repeat and repeat. After the third repeat, we'd hear him from the next room. He was shouting, shouting at a machine. We just sat there and listened...We didn't know what to do." The powerlessness was everybody's.

Time limits me from giving raw data examples of the gross com-

munication failure that surfaced over and over in this investigation. It was everywhere: between parent and child, between teachers, between parents and teachers and testers, between the school and outside professionals. There was no hint of coordination of goals or, in fact of any joint planning between elementary and secondary schools.

Perhaps we can understand the limitations of overcrowded, understaffed big-city school systems. It is harder to understand the communication failure of us, the specialists in consultant roles. Throughout Tony's school years, the professionals involved with him never saw themselves as part of the fabric of the problem. To most, home was the culprit. But the evidence revealed how the professionals operated in isolation, an isolation often fed by disagreement among themselves, suspicion of other points of view, and elitism. Repeatedly, they failed to ask for help from one another, failed to seek additional clarifying information or to share recommendations with those in a position to implement them.

The Petri parents felt blamed. The blame led to a breakdown in trust of the very helpers they had sought. These were proud people, sensitive to criticism, defensive and guilty about their son's failure. Spoken and implied judgments perceived as negative by the parents created barriers to communication and trust, and ultimately to their unconscious subversion of treatment goals. The Petris made an effort to participate in psychotherapy. The therapist made an effort to unite the parents when he perceived their marital discord. But these parents had grown comfortable--felt safer with secrecy and denial. They wanted to focus on Tony's learning problem. Trust had to be established slowly before they could look at the marriage. Very soon, the therapy did unite them. Unfortunately, it united them against therapy.

Communication through records was grossly negligent. For example, a thorough and insightful evaluation performed on 8-year-old Tony at his Guidance clinic was never forwarded to his new school, leading to a repeat of the entire battery just 3 months later. By then, the fed-up youngster refused to cooperate. Sadly, the first evaluation was never seen by anyone who might have implemented its excellent recommendations until my investigation SEVEN YEARS AFTER THE FACT.

In summation, I believe that Tony Petri failed to learn because of rage--an accelerating, sucked in anger that began with a label of Wrongness and grew cumulatively with each new miscommunication and misunderstanding. He was a boy with severe learning disabilities in a system with severe listening disabilities. Controlled anger led him, unconsciously, to sabotage remediation of his multiple problems. His secret rage was the understandable by-product of the war between his disabilities, his temperament, and the misunderstanding of both by those in his environment.

Controlled rage as a concomitant of learning failure is rarely, if ever, considered in learning disability circles. That oversight must change. Controlled rage can no longer be overlooked as a potential source both of school failure and of violence in our society. The evidence is too clear. School is the child's workingplace, a major source of his feelings of adequacy.

Let me clarify that, certainly, not all causes of violence are from school failure. Certainly, not all children who fail do so because of controlled rage. But the theory and supporting evidence being presented here and in my complete study is suggesting that we cannot overlook the powerlessness engendered by school failure as one

more possible source of such rage. Certain temperamental types under certain conditions may, in fact, have this kind of reaction. They may turn their anger against themselves and passively refuse to cooperate with helping services, or they may generalize that powerlessness and anger by acting out against society.

Many youth do indeed act out--a large number directing their violence specifically at the school. The National Institute of Education studied school-related violence in 1978. Here were their findings: Damage to school property costs from $50 to $200 million dollars per year. An average of 282 00 students and 5,200 teachers per month are attacked in schools, with 800,000 per month absent because of fear! In the robbery category, 2,400,000 students and 120,000 teachers per month are robbed. In this study, the researchers commented: "Violent students are more likely to be those who have given up on school, do not care about grades, find the courses irrelevant, and feel that nothing they do makes any difference." (National Institute of Education, 1978, p. 10)

In a recent TV special (ABC News Close Up, Sept. 4, 1984), about our schools, Ernest Boyer of the Carnegie Institute suggested that "The powerless will become increasingly angry, leading to crisis confrontation, and a dramatic erosion in the American dream. If empowered through education", he said, "they can debate issues, use language effectively, and gain confidence and skill. Without this , our security is imperiled." Some may regard this comment as sensationalism or media hype. I don't think so.

That same TV show compassionately exposed the powerlessness of another group--the educators and administrators, overburdened by the limitations upon their authority, the low level of respect, and the

insulting level of financial remuneration. We were told that the teacher's income has declined against every other occupation in our society except housecleaning. Let's hear the words of teachers quoted on that show--some of the best and the brightest--who had decided to give up teaching: "Did I do any good today? Did I do any teaching or was I just a clerk filling in time and occupying space? I have to play so many roles--teacher, psychologist, social worker, nurse, mother, father, and janitor. These children come to school upset because of crises at home. And I have kids at four grade levels in one class."

One high school teacher said, "We are marooned in the classroom. When I come home, I try very hard not to give any thought to how I spend my day."

There are many voices we must hear and help each other to hear. The findings I have presented today will, I hope, provoke further research as to their validity and prevalence. The findings were not meant to condemn. They were meant to inform, to expose the wholeness of a process, the wholeness and imperfection and vulnerability of the victims...and of the "experts." We, too, feel nervous and insecure and defensive. We too are limited by our own pressure, by the expectations upon us, by our prejudices and fears.

But we must become informed, become aware of the hidden factors and our unintentional roles in the breakdown of trust and communication failure. We must become aware of behaviors that leave indelible scars on young minds, and judgments or actions that interfere with confidentiality and respect.

You have heard my theory, some of the raw data, and my conclu-

sions. If they are valid conclusions, what might we, as educators, clinicians, and parents, learn from the lessons of Tony Petri? What strategies might we employ for combatting remediation failure whose basis may, in fact, be a hidden factor like controlled rage?

1) First, begin to <u>listen</u> differently. Listen with that proverbial third ear. Listen for what is really going on in your student's internal and external worlds.

2) Listen for <u>causes</u> behind the silence, the sullen looks, the body language, the isolation, the disruptive behavior, the signs of passive rebellion.

3) Listen for the Rightness in your student and for clues to explain the Wrongness.

4) Ask youself if you really "know" the child and his circumstances sufficiently to have gained his confidence and trust.

5) Seek collaboration. Make your student a <u>respected</u> <u>partner</u> in the process of determining and alleviating the problem. Why does he think progress is not occurring? What humiliates him? What does he wish he could do better? What does he want to learn and change? Use his goals as the jumping-off point, whether you are the parent or the professionals. Don't worry about that list of criteria that society or school says is on his "needs list." Inevitably, they will come up. But--if a child directs you to his needs, he will be much more likely to cooperate in meeting them and ultimately, in allowing you to direct him to other needs. Presume that he does not want to be a failure, because that is true.

6) Allow your <u>own</u> humanness some breathing room. Share personal joys, victories, and pains. Many parents and professionals never share

their own failures and fears with children. One student told me all of her tutors always knew everything about her but she never knew anything about them. She'd been deprived of their "flesh and blood" side.

7) Go down with them to feel their pains. I learned this last bit of advice from Tony himself: "I learned a lot about self-pity and how it keeps taking you down. And I found out that almost everybody who tries to help you does the wrong thing. They're always trying to cheer you up, and that's the worst thing you want to do. If you go down there with 'em and feel the pain and the sorrow and the anger and hate or whatever it happens to be about, it does a tremendous amount more good than sayin','Aw, it's OK.' 'Cause it's not OK."

For you professionals, here are some additional suggestions:

1) Seek different sources of insight--parent interviews, home or school visits, observations of social interactions, excursions to a setting other than the office.

2) Seek collaboration with parents, teachers, and other professionals. Talk to each other. Learn from each other.

3) Examine your own reactions to your clients. Do you find yourself judging, disapproving of their behaviors or statements?

4) Try to imagine that you ARE that child or parent. Put yourself in their skin, so to speak, and imagine how you would feel.

5) Learn about the prior help-seeking history and listen between the lines for former feelings of blame or breakdown in trust.

6) Expand your skills as a remediator and/or therapy-giver. Hurting humans want two things--your concern for their pains and your expertise in "fixing" them.

Let me close with a belief in the possible. We know that academic inadequacy robs a human of a sense of usefulness, of competency, of acceptance, of power. But for those of you who harbor the belief that teen age is too late to make significant reversals in these negative patterns, I subscribe to the words of Thomas and Chess at the conclusion of their recent long term study on behavior disorders. "We have been deeply impressed by the human capacity for flexibility, adaptability, and mastery in the face of all kinds of adverse and stressful life situations. The emotionally traumatized child is not doomed, the parents' early mistakes are not irrevocable, and our preventive and therapeutic interventions can make a difference at all age periods." (Thomas & Chess, 1984, p. 9)

Or as Tony Petri said when I apologized for not having completed the job of teaching him to read: "That's OK. You taught me that I COULD. I guess the rest is up to me."

References

ABC News Close Up: "To Save Our Schools, To Save Our Children", Sept. 4, 1984. Transcript, Journal Graphics Inc., New York.

Bethe, H. Personal communication, August 25, 1984. (KABC Radio, Michael Jackson Show, Los Angeles).

Krugman, R., & Krugman, M. (1984). Emotional Abuse in the Classroom. The Pediatricians Role in Diagnosis and Treatment. American Journal of Diseases of Children, 138(3).

McLoughlin, J., Nall, M., et al. (1983). The Relationship of Allergies and Allergy Treatment to School Performance and Student Behavior. Annals of Allergy, 51(5), 506-510.

Murray, C.A. (1976). The Link Between Learning Disabilities and Juvenile Delinquency: Current Theory and Knowledge. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

National Institute of Education. (1978). Violent Schools--Safe Schools: The Safe School Study Report to the Congress. Washington DC: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

Rothney, J.W. (19[illegible]). Methods of Studying the Individual Child: The Psychological Case Study. Xerox College Publishing Co.

Stainback, S., & Stainback, W. (1984). Broadening the Research Perspective in Special Education. Counsil for Exceptional Children Journal: Exceptional Children, 50(5), 400-407.

Thomas, A., & Chess, S. (1984). Genesis and Evolution of Behavioral Disorders: From Infancy to Early Adult Life. American Journal of Psychiatry, 141(1), 1-9.

Ungerleider, D.F. (1985). Reading, Writing, and Rage. California: Jalmar Press.